

Cutting Through the Social Media Muck

by Faith Wood

For the Legislative Employee

You've heard all the noise about Social Media. The grandiose claims. The staggering numbers. The spellbinding success stories.

...but is it TRUE?

...and is it for YOU?

No matter where you work, or what type of responsibilities you have within your organization, Social Media can be a fantastic tool to use.

IT CAN ALSO BE A NIGHTMARE IF YOU AREN'T CAREFUL.

Inside this whitepaper, we will explore the ins and outs of the wacky world of Social Media and discover how to put an end to the confusion, the hype and the nonsense.



Author Faith Wood sees opportunities in every challenge, and her approach to life is practical and straight-forward.

As a performance coach and speaker, her clients run the gamut from individuals to corporations, from small groups to large associations.

Faith, (of Airdrie, Alberta, Canada), has 15 years of experience as a Canadian peace officer. With over 10 years of professional speaking experience, Faith uses her diverse qualifications—as a master hypnotist, master and trainer in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), certified police leadership and performance coach, and certified handwriting analyst—to motivate audiences to change their lifestyles, communicate more efficiently and lead organizations with integrity.



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IN THIS PAPER WE WILL:

- Explore which social media platforms are the most beneficial for your individual purposes and why some might be 100x more useful for you to leverage than another.
- The right Social Media channels to use – and the ones to avoid (and why certain ones are 100X more useful for your company to leverage than the others).
- Social Media faux pas. The dumb things people have done that cost them their career, and the quick and easy fixes to follow when you aren't sure what to do.
- Meet the social media troll. Why they are your worst enemy, and how you can convert them to your best of friends. Discover why the trolls love getting your back up, and how to turn the tables on them and in your favor. (trolls are the ones you see that love leaving nasty comments everywhere in their wake: they feel they are smarter, wiser, and oh-so funny with their snide remarks. You can't ignore them, but you can embrace what they can do FOR YOU)
- Social media policy: fact or fiction? If you have one – here's what to do with it. If you don't have one – here's how to create one that works.
- Social Media Geek Speak for the Business world. What to use and not use in the business world (smiley faces, lols, you name it... it may be your downfall). Discover a practical formula for mastering the language that works in Social Media... without losing your cool or your job.
- You've heard of road rage... get ready to meet your newest friend and foe... Social Media Rage. Legislative employees have certain codes of conduct they need to stick with. Find out what you can do, say, and what you should avoid posting.

...and much more.

Part 1 : Understanding Social Media

How the Legislative (government) staff in North America can best utilize Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Social Media is a very important tool in today's corporate, personal and the Non-Governmental sector not only in America but in many countries around the world. Though the whole world of social media has only been in existence for the last 10 or so years, however, its impact has been enormous. The American president is on record saying that social media websites such as Facebook are not only tools but a way of life. Today, it would be difficult to imagine a world without social tools. To better understand the whole social media craze, it is important to first evaluate the trends.

According to some of the research, more than 60% of all Americans have a social network profile. More than 23% of all Americans with social network profiles use the sites more than 5 times per day. In addition, of all the Americans with social network profiles, more than 80% of them use Facebook. Though Twitter is currently trailing Facebook by far, the fact is that it is still an authority company with over 250 million users. Using these figures, it would seem that more than 187 million Americans have social media accounts. These figures are simply amazing and it is likely that no one would have predicted such figures years ago. Today, things have changed and the world has started appreciating the impact of social media in modern society.

This paper will explore a few basic facts about the use of social media in the government sector in both the United States and Canada. First we will explore how social media is being utilized and who is finding the greatest value in it.

- About 70% of social network users are female compared with about 60% of men (perhaps this is a reflection of the social nature of social media).

% of Internet users per age

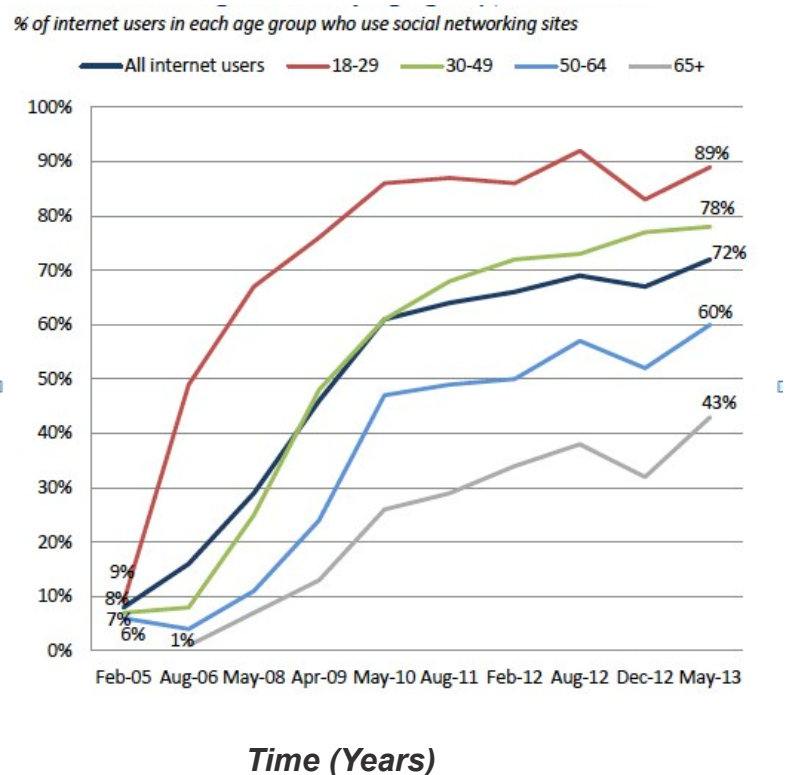


Fig 1: Use of social networks in terms of age group (source: Pew Research Center)

- Canada has 19 million users. In fact, Canada has been identified as the most active Facebook country in the world. The graph below indicates the social media intake by age. In the figure, it is evident that most of the users of social networks are young people between 19-29 years.

THE PLATFORMS KNOWN AS SOCIAL MEDIA



For some users, Facebook is without a doubt the greatest social media network in the world. With total users of about 1.3 billion people, Facebook is responsible for more than 60% of the total market share.

Some of the major features of Facebook that make it a good place to be are:

- Ease of account creation and account manipulation
- creation of company and individual pages
- the like tool which allows one to follow anything that he has a deep conviction about, social gaming and giving out of gifts (among others).

With such tools, it is not a doubt that Facebook will continue dominating the market share for many years to come.

However, the company still faces a lot of challenges. For instance, recent reports indicate that by 2017, Facebook will have lost a lot of its young users to new and upcoming social networks such as Snapchat. In fact, to react to these numbers, the company placed a \$3 billion offer to SnapChat.

When you look at the usage statistics, Facebook has become the place to put your photos. This is not just from the desktop but the smart phone and the tablet. Facebook is making a big push to become even more mobile.

It is not possible to talk about social media and its impacts and forget the biggest internet company in the world today - Google.

Google has been in the market for many years more than Facebook. It has tried a number of social networks some of which have failed to make it. However, Google+ has been the saviour of the company (socially speaking). To date, Google+ has more than 500 million users and is currently growing at a rate faster than was initially anticipated.



This is due greatly to the fact that a Google+ account is mandatory whenever you create a new Gmail account. This is pushing up the account ownership stats. No other social network has Google's web assets leverage. Its integration with Gmail has made this platform desirable for many users. As will be seen in the graphs below, Google+ is slowly catching up on Facebook. Facebook still dominates at 70% of account ownership but Google+ is not far behind at just over 50%. Like Facebook, Google+ users are keen to post and share photos. Its banner and image display makes the user experience compelling, contagious and immersive.

Following closely behind Facebook's popularity is Twitter. Twitter is a growing and currently boasts more than 265M users in a relatively short period of time. Do you get sick of hearing about what someone had for breakfast, where they have been or who they are talking to on Twitter? The figures show that Twitter is a lot about your daily activities. You could call it the personal news channel.



Twitter's selling point is the hash tag (#) and the fact that it limits the number of characters one can use in their post to only 140. This makes it a good place to grab quick information and news from many sources and news feeds. In fact, from a quick glance at some of the most influential people in the world, you will note that they are currently using Twitter more than they are using Facebook.

Twitter recently debuted at the Nasdaq with an IPO that was well received by the masses. Though, the share value declined by a huge margin percentage after the release of the annual report, analysts believe that it could make a lot more money this year. This is partly as a result of many fresh product offerings that are planned for debut this year.

YouTube is a completely different and unique form of social media. It is the world's largest social media for sharing videos. On a daily basis, it is estimated that more than 100K videos are uploaded with more than 20 million comments posted to those videos. As a result, YouTube has become an intelligent and useful marketing tool not only for the corporate sector but also for the government sector as well.



For every video Ad that is placed in traditional commercial formats, the government has the capacity to put the same Ad on YouTube (for free). For instance, one of the most common Ads in recent times was that of the Obama Medical Care plan. The biggest advantage to this type of integrated marketing and communication strategy is the visibility of the live streaming metrics. With YouTube, as an advertiser you will have the metrics as to who saw the video and their personal comments as to how it made them feel. In fact, tools have been developed to aggregate YouTube comments to find out the general mood of viewers. At the back end of the video, the advertiser is also able to see the country where the comments came from.



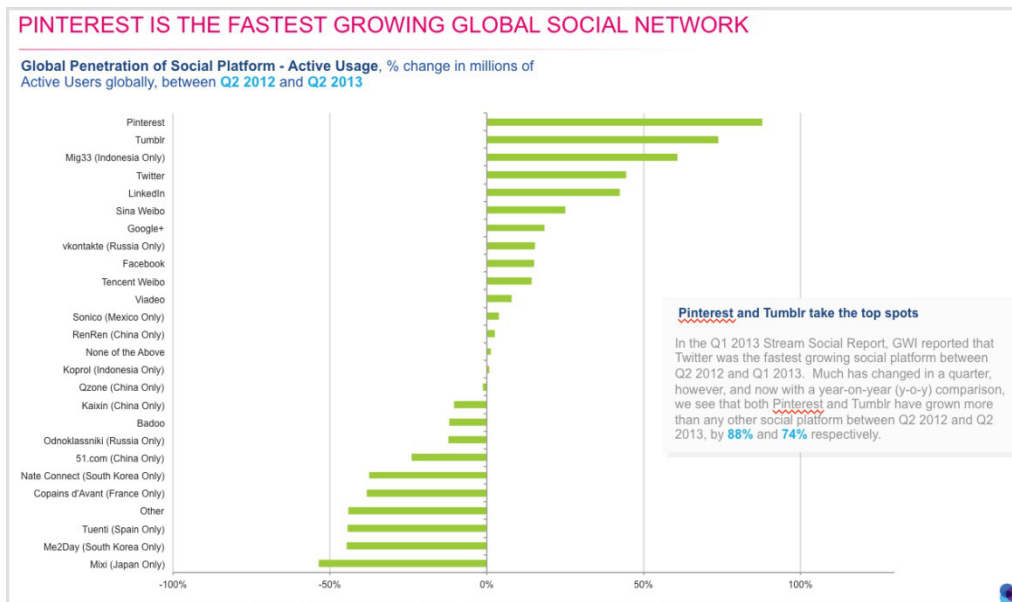
LinkedIn is the biggest social network for professionals to meet, share and create impact. To date, LinkedIn is profitable as a result of its unique monetizing strategies such as company job listings.

Linked In is the network of choice for most knowledge workers and professionals. It is maybe the most conservative of the social networks due to the fact it is all about business. It is becoming more social as it has realized that this will enhance its user penetration and attractiveness. The latest statistics show it having 7% of its users over 55 and 14% in the 45 to 54 age range.



Pinterest is currently one of the fastest growing social networks. The visual web is driving the rise of Pinterest and Tumblr with growth rates of 88% and 74% respectively over the last 12 months. Twitter and LinkedIn though are still rapid risers with growth rates around 40%.





Social Media Platform Recap:

As the world continues to embrace social media, the ways we use the social networks are becoming clearer.

Twitter with its short and snappy messaging is very dependent on mobile usage and smart phones. The rise of the visual web is making Pinterest and Tumblr the fastest growing social networks on the planet. Facebook is where we share with friends and family. Google+ is no longer an afterthought and is embedded in Google's web assets including Gmail, local checkins and the mobile Android ecosystems.

Google is getting the data it wants from Google+. Demographics, usage and content popularity. This is feeding into how it is ranking search results and much more. The universes of content, social and search are being woven together and creating a web experience that looks more like magic everyday. The social and mobile web is becoming an extension of our lives as we share, search and upload photos.

Artificial intelligence that adds other dimensions to humanity has already arrived but we just don't notice it. We take it for granted.

To better illustrate the current global rankings of social networks and their penetration around the globe, take a peek at the graph below:

Global Penetration of Social Platform - Active Usage, % of internet users globally, Q2 2013

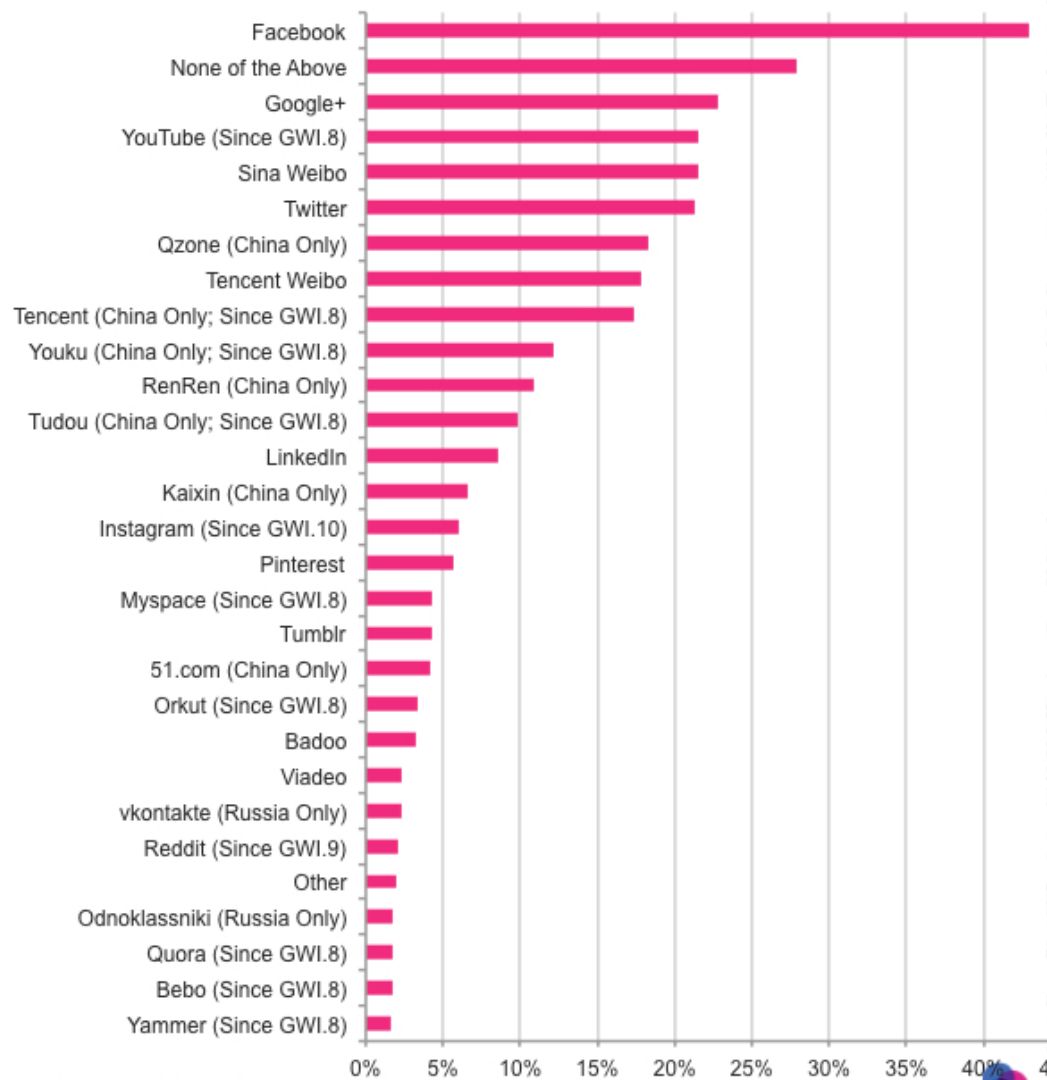


Fig 1: A figure showing the social media penetration around the world

HOW THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA

There are many methods by which the government can begin leveraging the use of social networks. In fact, did you know that government communicators can save a lot of cash by implementing an effective social media plan?

Some of the major reasons for this are:

- It is a faster method of disseminating information to many people in real time
- It is a safe and relatively secure method of sharing information
- It is a transparent method of sharing information and disseminating data
- Unless it is altered or deleted, the information is available for a long duration
- It is an efficient method of data and information sharing
- Retrieving the data is easier than traditional methods of data sharing:

Using Social Media, it is possible to see the metrics of the people who saw the content. For instance, using Google+, it is possible for you (the user) to carefully analyze the viewers. In traditional media, such as television, getting the actual demographics of people who saw a particular ad is often not very easy or accurate.

Okay, let us consider some of the ways which government has already been using social media and its effectiveness:

Election forecasting

Elections play a very important role in any democratic country. This is a chance for citizens to voice their opinions and elect their leaders. Being able to shift your electoral messaging to match the mood of voters during a campaign (in order to garner positive support) is important intelligence for a viable campaign. During the election period, social media can be used to research and disseminate a lot of this information.

For instance, in the 2012 USA Presidential election, the key contenders were Barrack Obama (Democrat) and Mitt Romney (Republican). During the campaign, many predictions were made by the traditional pollsters such as Gallup and television polls. In these polls, the results showed Mitt Romney in the lead with Obama's popularity trailing. During this same period, however, Twitter developed a very

timely tool called Twindex which showed Obama in the lead. When the final votes were tallied, Barack Obama had beaten Mitt Romney. This was a very important period of time in the world of social media. The real time feeds prevailed and showed the world that it is more popular and, at times, more reliable than the traditional methods.

As if that was not enough, during the 2012 election period, a lot of information was exchanged in the social media. This allowed many people to share and exchange views about many topics during the election. Today, Barack Obama is among the most followed individuals on both Facebook and Twitter.

With close to 200 million people in America engaging on social media, it is expected that the World will be moving towards watching social media predictions for reliable election forecasting than ever before. Candidates will be wise to engage with voters through this medium.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Awareness

As noted above, social media is a growing phenomenon with more than 68% of all Americans using the sites. As smart phones continue to advance, making it easier and easier to connect through social media, attention will need to be focused on distributing important information on these platforms.

Social media is not just a young person's hangout either. Individuals in their 60s and 70s are currently using these social networks to stay in touch and read the news as well. As usage numbers climb, government has been adopting social media strategies to report disasters that occur around the world. In the 2011 New York City earthquake that affected thousands of people, the government used social media to quickly disseminate pertinent information to the general public. As well, the people who were trapped in the disaster used the social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to aid in their own search and rescue. Therefore, in the humanitarian exercise, the use of social media cannot be understated.

A quick look at the global scale, shows social media sites being leveraged at a rapid rate to disseminate key information to followers. When International media such as CNN and Reuters have been barred access in a country, social media sites have managed to share intelligence and keep dialogues going. This shows that the global community understands the use of social media and is doing whatever they can to achieve a lot of success.

Dissemination of information

The United States government is a great example of an entity increasing its use of social media. The PR (Public Relations) department of the US government is quite active when it comes to social net-

works and the dissemination of information. Using Facebook (USA.gov) and Twitter (@USA.gov), the United States government is regularly updating information for the American people. To date, the Facebook page has about 164K users. On its part, the Twitter handle has about 900K followers. Though these numbers are not very reflective of the vast majority of the United States citizens, it is important to note that they are engaged numbers.

In Canada, the government uses social media to disseminate current and relevant information. The Canadian Finance Ministry uses Twitter (@FinanceCanada). The department of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada uses the (@AAFC_Canada) to communicate

The following images are live extracts of some of the posts made by the PR staff of the United States Government on Social Networks – these are a clear example of how live stream information is being broadcast.

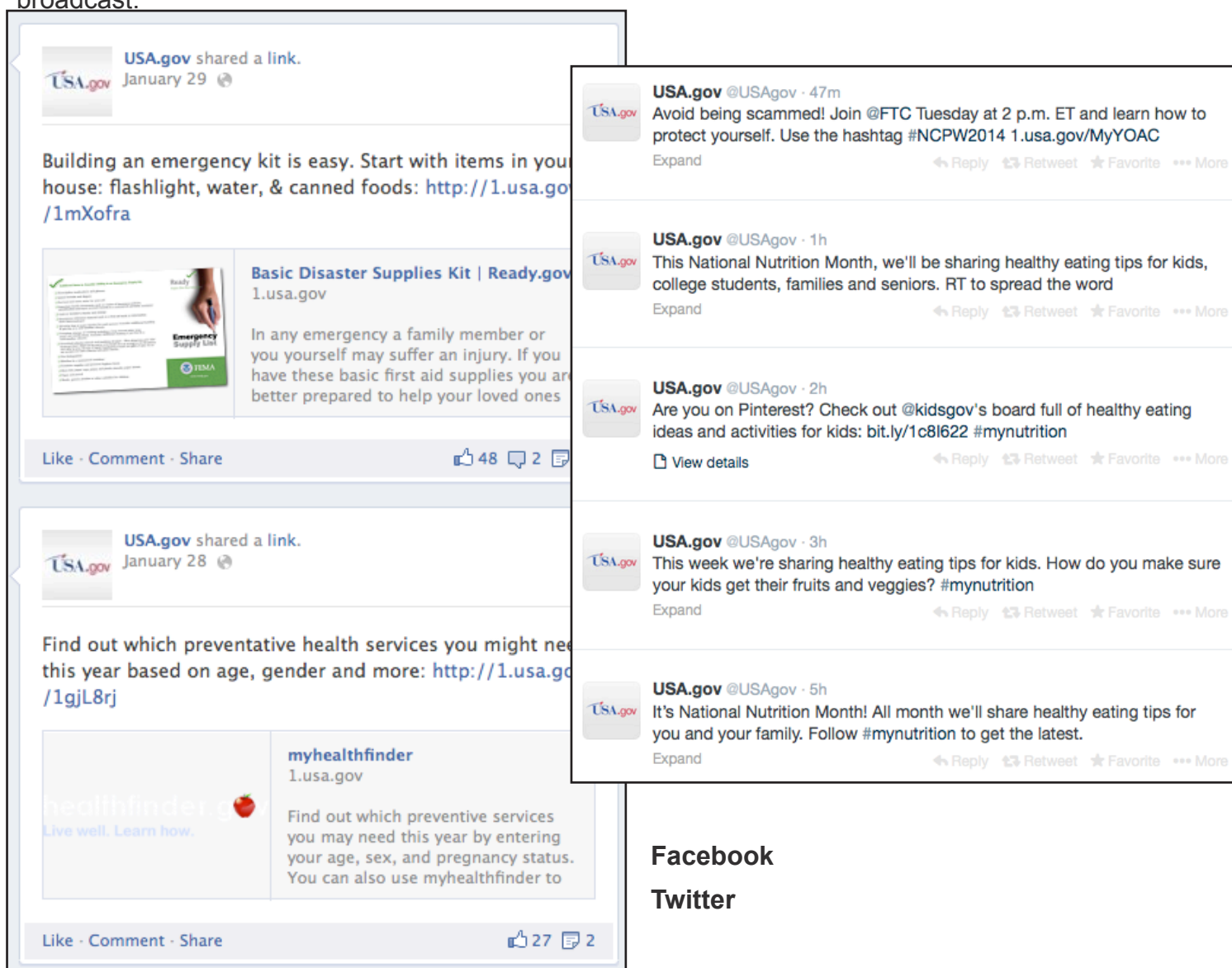


Fig 3: A live extract of the United States Government Social Network Sites

While this information may be important for the general public, it is very important to ensure that users are well integrated to the system and engaged in the conversations. This means, that we need to keep the conversations social. No one wants to be inundated with sales pitches and boring messages. Conversations on these platforms are designed to be lively, thought provoking and even (at times) amusing or entertaining.

As will be seen later in the paper, the use of social media has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Different governmental bodies such as the ministries have their own pages which they use to highlight key developments in their divisions. However, each department needs to be clear on the strategy of engagement. From Olympics coverage to timely tips and suggestions, keeping your followers interested needs to be priority number one.

Saving of capital

With the deadline to its debt ceiling rapidly approaching, the US government is facing a lot of fiscal challenges. They are not alone in this predicament. All world governments are looking for lower cost strategies in an effort to help save dollars and pay down debts. One method of doing this is through the use of the world wide web and social media. The US government has launched a number of online social media campaigns as a way of testing efficacy. For instance, when the infamous Obamacare plan was launched, the government used a number of online campaigns to sensitize the people on the benefit of taking the plan. In addition to all this, the Whitehouse recently held a social media competition that allowed followers to send along innovative ideas and suggestions on additional ways the government could save money. Tapping into these types of initiatives could potentially save millions of dollars per year.

How the government can stay in touch with its target audience effectively

It is legitimate to say that the online strategies in terms of social media from the United States government have been moderately successful. With more than 170M social media networks, the United States government should be way ahead when it comes to internet users. But the question is, is it? In order to answer this, it is important to understand the ways which the government can produce a strong social media footprint.

Lessons from the Corporate sector

Social media has been quite effective when it comes to the corporate sector. In terms of the profitability aspect of companies, many firms have gained significantly from the use of social media platforms. A

great example of this is Zynga. Zynga is a social gaming company that is currently listed in the Nasdaq. The origin of the company is strongly associated with Facebook. Companies such as Amazon and eBay have attributed part of their financial success to social media as well.

For government to leverage social media platforms and reach more people, it is important for it to learn a thing or two from the corporate sector. Some of the best practices that the government can use have been explained in this paper.

Creation of massive campaigns

The first strategy that government can use is the creation of high quality campaigns aimed at introducing specific government branded social networks to the people. Yes, this is expensive and will likely face a lot of rebellion from those in congress and other representative bodies. However, these are simply upfront costs. In the long run, once a strong following has been established, government will ultimately save a lot of cash normally distributed to traditional media. Disseminating timely information using social media is very cheap compared to when mass media channels are used. Corporate bodies such as Amazon and Apple recognize this and are constantly spending millions of dollars to get many social media likes – word of mouth (text) referrals. The result of these efforts has produced steady and continued growth of their companies.

The sad part of the government side is that, rather than spending the upfront dollars, it is currently relying on organic search to boost the uptake of their social media pages. They simply don't invest time and resources to the marketing as is seen in successful corporate campaigns. This type of marketing strategy is an critically important aspect of creating a strong social media impact.

A quality social media strategy

The greatest value of social media is in the engagement of your chosen community. Building a strong community needs to be just as important online as it is offline. In order to do this, attention must be focused on starting a conversation and inviting contributors to participate. Just like in the corporate world, there is a huge need for a quality social media strategy that will propel the country towards more social aspects of development. Some of these strategies have been merged together through various departments of both the national and state government.

Tools to be used in this aspect

The National Security Agency (NSA) is involved in social media 'inspection'. At their offices, the agency has developed important algorithms that are used to scan the internet for useful elements. It is no doubt that the social media world puts to the test a question of security. Hate speech can be spread virally

in an environment of perceived anonymity and free, unlimited access. Being mindful of this potential, social media posts must be regularly and consistently monitored and responded to when necessary.

A variety of tools have been developed to help with quality social media surveillance and streamlining of communications. One of these tools is **Hootsuite**. Basically, *hootsuite* allows one to monitor their social media accounts using a single platform. As a result, the person will end up saving a lot of time when creating posts for the variety of social media pages.

There are other tools that perform a similar task. Some of them are **Tweetdeck**, **Seesmic**, **Twitterfeed** and **Spreadfast** among others. Of these *Hootsuite* is the most popular tool used by millions of people.

The question is should government use these generic tools to manage their own platforms? I say – YES – why re-invent the wheel. With security a top priority, however, there needs to be ongoing and regular monitoring and safeguards in place to protect (as much as possible) from potential hacks. This will require an investment of some IT support depending on the number of gateways and portals.



Part 2: Overcoming the Confusion, Hype and Nonsense

As discussed in part 1 of this paper, the use of social media is a vital and necessary component of any communication strategy in modern society. It should not be ignored, under-utilized or overlooked. It is not a passing fad. Early adopters - Individuals as well as corporate entities - have benefited tremendously from incorporating social media into their marketing and promotional strategies. However, there are some challenges that have emerged as a result of the viral nature of these platforms. In this section of the whitepaper, a number of those challenges will be identified and a few solutions to them identified.

Challenge #1: Posts are overly serious

Social media should be a social place. It should not be treated as an office or a conference where people are talking about serious items or tasks all the time. To make the social networks better, it is important to have a social aspect into it. I find it laughable that CEOs join social networks only to post about their companies. There are, no doubt, some high profile CEOs that people follow regardless, but most knowledgeable executives understand you have to get personal. That above lighthearted joke about what you had for lunch is not what I mean. “People don’t fall in love with hex colors and logos — they fall in love with people”. Moreover, most of the people in these social networks are a younger generation, hungry for quick insights and tasty bites not long boring dissertations and sales pitches.

Therefore, it is important to engage in some humour when you post. Consider posting comics or some other strategy that introduces levity into the posting. Successful posters believe they are adding value to your day, on and off social media and ensure that their messages align to that philosophy. As a government agency, social media should not be about the government all the time – that makes you boring. At times, posting something positive and inspirational can really help – at the end of the day, be genuine and real – this is how and why people continue to follow. Followers are human beings not computers. Engage them in part of the conversation - focus on dialogue and not monologue.

Challenge #2: Language barriers

Essentially we need to be aware that American news is not just for American's only. We are global partners and our policies and decisions create a ripple effect amongst other world leaders. As such, what affects America will often impact other countries especially the emerging markets and they are following your posts. Most of the social posts in the American social networks are in English. This is a barrier to people from other nationalities who may not have a solid comprehension of this language. As a result, keep the words you use easier to interpret. OR, consider posting photos that help make the expression for you, thus keeping language neutral. This does not only apply to the government but rather to all entities utilizing the social networks.



Challenge #3: Scams and inappropriate comments

Some of the more unscrupulous of the population will leverage their own agendas and interests. Others may use social networks to freely market their own products as well as their companies and post these on your pages and yes, without permission. As a result, on a page where people are discussing key issues, it is almost certain that these guys will show up and post something controversial or promote their own products and services. This has the potential to create some challenges as there is (essentially) no good or positive way of getting rid of these guys apart from unfollowing them which is also a bit challenging, particularly when attempting to create an open source forum for all rate payers to access.

Challenge #4: The transient nature of social media

It is estimated that many social media users are of a younger generation and recent data indicates that these young people are deleting their accounts at a high rate. When interviewed, they have shared discontent with high levels of promotion in posts as well as the fact that their parents are on social media (perhaps that makes it less cool). As a result, the future of social networking is a bit difficult to predict. Twitter posted a \$600 million loss in 2013. Facebook posted a profit but a declining number of users. In addition, Facebook reports that it has more than 200 million fake accounts. (obviously a bit of a security threat for users). These numbers pose a great challenge in the world of social media target identification and overall effectiveness.

It is important for newcomers and communication personnel to not try to dominate every single social network. Take time to consider where your target audience is and go there. Common sense, but not so easy to do it if you listen to the buzz instead of your customers. HubSpot (a social media blogging group) points out that no one network is the Holy Grail. You need to play in more than one sandbox to be truly effective. Most often, the top 3 can meet your need: Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. But you may find that Pinterest or FourSquare rings the bell. Pick a few and focus your energy you're your languaging of posts to those desired demographics.

The Social Media World in a Nutshell

Today, there are hundreds of social media networks. The number could actually reach the thousands. Some of the social media sites are basically for use in a multi-device approach (PC, Smart Phone, Tablet, etc). For instance, Facebook and Twitter have apps for all devices. And, there are those networks that are for use on only mobile devices. Snapchat, Whatsapp, Viber and Instagram are some of these applications.

It is important to use the tools which will yield wide exposure to the masses. This means that you should

go for tools that are used both on the desktop work stations as well as mobile devices. When considering which social media platforms to focus on, it is important to consider the demographics of your target audience with which you wish to engage in dialogue.

The graph below illustrates a 2013 study of social media preferences by age demographic:

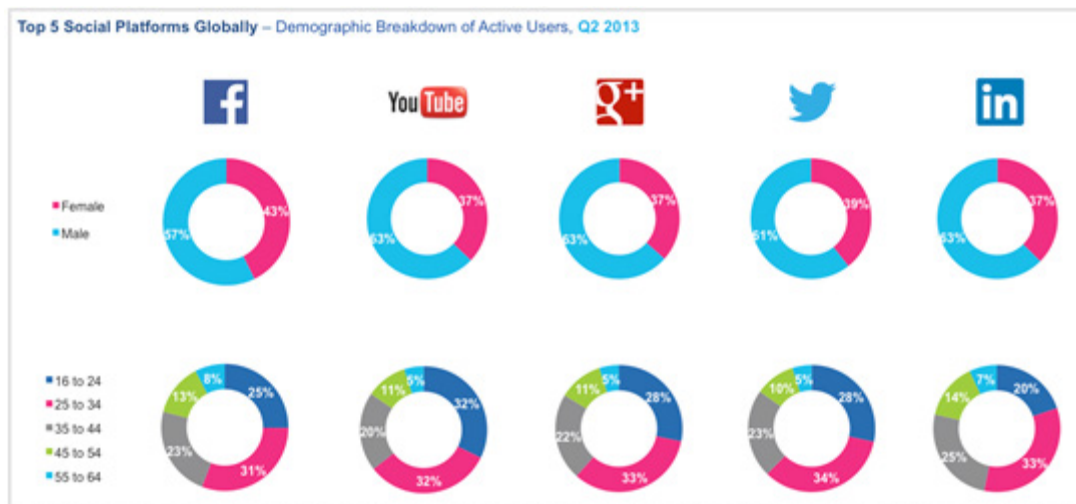


Figure 4: An illustration of the best social media tools to use

By considering the above survey, you will be in a good position to make a solid impact in your social media strategy.

As you can see, Facebook is the leading tool globally. However, the good thing about social media is that you can combine all the tools and it will cost you relatively nothing. In fact, you will only pay if participating in pay for click advertising - when someone visits your link and visits your page.

Social Media Faux Pas

Social media is only of perceived value when integrated well into your existing communication strategies. If you use these platforms in the wrong way, you will not be in a good position to be successful or productive with it. In fact, many people have used social media campaigns and failed.

Some of the most important social media faux pas that you should avoid are:

1. A problem with posting

The first social media mistake that you need to avoid has to do with the posts that you make. This means that you should only make posts that are of high quality and that will not bore the reader (as dis-

cussed previously). I don't know of anyone who eagerly checks their social media pages for the latest promotional posts. And many users are frustrated with platforms due to the constant noise (irrelevant information that is either boring or repetitive or both). Successful social media people listen. Listening means monitoring, observing, and responding based on what you discover in other posts. As a business person or PR staff member, you need to make it a habit keep your posts to a maximum of 2 posts per day, unless some major event is occurring that requires ongoing updates (flood, fire, Olympics, etc). Keep your posts straight to the point. To prove this, a recent survey in Canada among young people indicated that they disliked people, companies and government agencies which make tens of posts per day promoting their ideas. It is always useful to promote others worthy accomplishments – it helps to build your cohesive reputation.

2. Content that you post or follow



Many people have fallen into the trap of making vague or vulgar posts. For instance, imagine someone who posts semi naked pictures online. Today, recruitment staff are doing the best they can to vet a person prior to the interview stage. This means that they are often thoroughly inspecting a potential candidate's personal social media network. What kind of career supports naked pictures on a profile?

In recent times, a number of major social media faux pas have been reported inside government agencies. For instance, the United Kingdom is on record to having posted a vacancy for prostitutes. This did not go very well with many people who saw the advert. The advert which also appeared in their website was posted by 'horny' escorts. It appeared in the website of the department of works. Now you appreciate the need for constant and regular monitoring of your social pages.

3. Social media at the work place

In many businesses, there is usually free access to the internet using WI-FI. This means that employees can access all the internet pages that they may need. However, productivity is a requirement of the workplace and policing employee conduct can be quite time consuming. As a result, many companies have policies written which allow them to potentially fire members of staff for inappropriately using social media at work. For instance, in one of the most famous incident, CISCO fired an employee who had made a negative post about the company. She was found using Twitter and Facebook during office hours. The examples of all this could go on and on.

4. Posting ill materials of someone or company

Last but not least, there is the problem of posting materials that don't add value to a particular person. Spoiling the reputation of a company and an individual can cost you money and also your career. Before you post anything controversial online, it is important to do some deep research about it in an effort to avoid unnecessary trouble.

For example, when Amy Winehouse passed on, Microsoft was at the receiving end of some pretty negative feedback for taking the opportunity to promote their own products and services. The following post was made in Twitter and it was not well received by Winehouse fans.



After receiving considerable push back from those in the social media community, the media and the press, the company released the following apology:



How to fix your inevitable social media faux pas

With the above said, it is now important to understand some of the things that one can do to fix a problem post should one be made. Just like in face to face communication, you need to treat the online world similar to the offline world – you need to create a positive online reputation campaign. For instance, if you are a corporate body or government employee who has posted some unfavourable ideas in the social media (personal or corporate):

- Coming up with a timely and succinct public apology is critical.
- Apologizing to the management for violating the social media policy is necessary
- Being careful of perceptions when you post is crucial

Social Media Trolls and how to convert them into fans

Beefs are often aired in the social media. When you post something on social media, Trolls are individuals who will always comment in the worst manner possible. Social media trolls are everywhere. The fact of the matter is that they can be a pain and eat up your valuable time and energies. Therefore, learning how to convert them into potential fans. This is essential. (You can learn more about trolls and their behaviours in our whitepaper which focuses on the issue of cyberbullying.)

Accept them as part of social life

The first thing you need to do to convert these social media trolls into your number one fan is to accept them as they are. Understand that the online community is not made up entirely of your friends. It includes people, many of them you will never meet. By appreciating them and acknowledging their valuable contributions or insights whenever they say something negative or unfavourable about you or your organization. Remaining objective and respectful is a part of converting them into fans whenever possible. Remember their comments come from their perspective and they may not share your inside knowledge. In addition, even if the Trolls don't convert, the rest of your tribe will appreciate your level of professionalism.

Reacting to their sentiments

When something is said online that is damaging to your reputation, it is important to release a statement. The main goal for this statement should be to create clarity for your followers that whatever is being said is either inaccurate in context or potentially, absolutely not true. Many social media experts



believe that when you clear up misunderstandings with facts, you will be in a good position to be successful with your social media communications. Keep in mind that sometimes you want to create a bit of controversy as part of your overall strategy – it helps get people's attention.

What If worst comes to worst...

If worst comes to worst and these trolls are relentless or ruthless with their posts, you can consider reporting illegal activity (slander); deactivate them from your following list and/or report behaviours to social media overseers when violations of policy occur. Do your best to make peace with them. However, if they do not respond with a higher degree of ethics and integrity, you should not be afraid to report them to the social network.

Need for a Social Media Policy

Whether you are a corporate body, NPO (Non Profit Organization), Government entity or a personal individual, social media can be invaluable to you as you share information and grow your online community. However, the same tools can have a number of disadvantages as explored previously in this paper. As great a benefit they can be in helping you raise awareness or interest in a cause, social networks can also disrupt your activities and make you profoundly less productive. It is very important to have a high quality social media policy which helps you to create a system to avoid some of these pitfalls.

An effective social media policy should facilitate direction and focus – some of these are pointed out below:

- Know when and what to post in the social media
- Understanding how often to post or comment on social media per day
- Understand the demographics of the people who are desirable to follow and the people to engage in conversations (relationship building activities) with
- Understand the best strategies to help you be successful with your social media campaigns. For instance, knowing when and how much to pay for social media advertisements and such
- Understanding the best practices to use when using social media to foster new relationships

It is important to have a solid document explaining the social media policy of an organization. This should be a document which every member of staff should be familiar with and one that should be consistently evolving as trends shift. A typical policy will also set out parameters for the use of social

media at the work place; define the priority topics to be posted on social media by the company admin and the consequences of inappropriately using social media in the work place.

When first initiating a social media policy, it is important to:

- Understand the corporate value of the organization. Recognize and analyze the key values that guide the organization. These should be used in the formulation of any kind of policy.
- Assign the tasks: This means that you should assign the messages and campaign tasks that are important for the organization to distribute online. For instance, you need to have a good understanding of who does the posting, on what platforms and how often.
- Set the consequences: The policy document that you have should set out the consequences if, for instance, a member of staff is found violating the policy.
- Consult widely with all the stakeholders: A bottom-top approach should be used for this strategy.
- Disseminate and test the policies: The policies set should be spread widely to all the key stakeholders involved and tested for usefulness. A policy is only good if someone is adhering to it.

In a large organization, it may be useful to establish a Social Media Council whose task it will be to oversee dialogue online and:

- Turn the trolls from enemies to friends
- Overcome internal objections
- Eliminate duplication of effort
- Speak with a unified voice
- Identify and share best practices

By having a good social media policy, you will be more productive. You will understand the best practices to follow and the ones to ignore. Etiquette is very important in all your online engagement, especially for government personnel. You should treat people respectfully as this will affect how you operate and how you are perceived as an entity. Reputation is all there is.

Effective Social Media for business

As a business entity, Non-Profit Organization (NPO) or individual, it is imperative that you realize the best practices for using social media. This is simply because of the fact that you have different goals and objectives for your involvement with social media. As an individual, your goal might be to simply connect and share with your family and peers. As a private business entity, you may be more interested in creating relationships with potential clients. As a government organization, you might be focused on letting your community know about changes in policy and decisions and gaining insight about what your customers expectations are in service deliveries. Regardless of the motivations, what you post in the social media should be in alignment with your objectives and your social media policy.

Remember that the overriding principle of social media is the intent to keep discussions social in nature. This is not a place to host a conference or a meeting or anything that remotely feels like one.



Do's

- ensure that you are using social language that is focused on the demographic of the group you wish to engage with
 - Smiley faces and short forms such as LOL (laugh out loud) and ASAP (As soon as possible) are perfectly acceptable in your social media posts. While many firms may not be comfortable with it, they need to understand that social media is a social place where such languages are, and will continue to be, used.
-
- Success in social media demands that you get personal
 - Respond to comments made on your posts in a friendly and respectable manner.
 - You are part of a community, if you're doing this right. Some may argue that you cannot ask people to comment or follow or retweet you. There are no rules, folks. We're making this up as we go. It can be done in an ethical and conscientious way – and it works. Ask for help in spreading important messages.
 - A simple call-to-action like “please retweet” can go a long way to generate more social activity.



Don'ts

Ideally, these don'ts should be highlighted in the social media policy developed above. Do not:

- use vulgar language to respond to the comments of the users,
 - fail to reply to posts made on your behalf,
 - post or respond to comments in an unprofessional manner
-
- use a different language than that which your followers expect from you.

When the do's and the don'ts have been synchronized together, the company will without a doubt have a more effective social media strategy that produces tangible results.

Faith can be found online at:

Official Websites:

www.faithwood.com
www.faithwoodhypnosis.ca
www.imind.ca

Social Media Networks:

www.facebook.com/faith.wood1
[twitter.com//Inspiring_Minds](https://twitter.com/Inspiring_Minds)
<http://www.pinterest.com/fwood68/>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Eu3DBP7_9w&list=UUIBtzidj4wekebd1FuhM-Eg&feature=share&index=8

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